

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)


HON. EDITOR: T. I. M. CLULOW
(Kingston-upon-Thames Public Library)

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The Library Assistant ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE next meeting of the Section will be held at 6.30 p.m. on 13th May at Deptford Central Library, Lewisham High Road, S.E.14. Mr. H. V. A. Bonny, F.L.A. (Middlesex County Library), will read a paper on "Librarianship as a career"; the chair will be taken by Councillor F. D. W. Ross, Chairman of the Libraries Committee. The following programme has been arranged for the afternoon:

- 2.30 p.m. Assemble at Deptford Town Hall, New Cross Road, S.E.14, for a brief tour of the building, kindly arranged by the Town Clerk, Ernest C. Seare, Esq.
- 3 p.m. Proceed to Goldsmiths' College (University of London)—one minute's walk away—for a tour of the college and grounds, kindly arranged by the Warden, Miss A. E. Dean, M.A. Members will be entertained to tea by the College authorities. It is also hoped to arrange a short recital on the new organ in the Great Hall.

Will all those intending to be present kindly notify Mr. R. D. Hilton Smith, Central Library, Lewisham High Road, S.E.14, *not later than 9th May?*

For members from Central London the best route is Charing Cross to New Cross. Both New Cross and New Cross Gate stations are only a few minutes from the Town Hall. Bus services 20, 21, 36, 48, 136, 137, and trams 35, 36, 38, 40, 46, 54, 66, 74 all pass the Town Hall. The Central Library is about four minutes' walk away.

The Annual General Meeting of the Section was held at Chaucer House on 8th April. In the afternoon about thirty members enjoyed a tour of places of interest in the Metropolis. The meeting itself, of course, attracted a larger, though hardly a satisfactory, attendance. In the course of formal business we had the pleasure of welcoming the Hon. Secretary back after his illness, and of paying a well-earned tribute to Mr. A. R. Hewitt for his services as Hon. Treasurer and Acting Hon. Secretary. The retiring President, Mr. W. E. Hurford, in his unavoidable absence, was accorded an appreciative vote of thanks for his work during an exceptionally arduous year of office; and the meeting concluded with Mr. F. Seymour Smith's Presidential Address. Despite the handicap of his recent illness, he had contrived a lively and pertinent paper, which his audience thoroughly enjoyed. We print it elsewhere in

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this issue, that those who could have *heard* it but did not take the trouble, may read and take it to heart.

The result of the ballot on the motion empowering the Council to negotiate a new agreement with the Library Association was declared at the Annual Meeting to be as follows:

For the motion	-	-	-	-	1,165
Against	-	-	-	-	98
					<hr/>
Majority in favour	-	-	-	-	1,067

2,503 papers were issued, and 1,349—about 54 per cent.—were returned. Eighty-six papers were spoilt, or arrived too late to be valid.

The recent ballot for the vacancy on the London side of the Council resulted as follows: W. H. Phillips, 202; F. M. Gardner, 141; S. G. Berriman, 25; H. V. A. Bonny, 13; B. Bennett, 8; W. F. Broome, 8; W. Myson, 6; E. F. Ladds, 5. Mr. Phillips was therefore elected.

The next meeting of the Council will be held on 6th May at Chaucer House.

We have to apologize for the error in announcing the date of the monthly meeting in April, and trust that members were not seriously inconvenienced.

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ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Members of the Library Association will be held in the Winter Gardens, Margate, on Wednesday, 10th June, 1936, at 2.15 p.m.

(Signed) P. S. J. WELSFORD,

Secretary.

Agenda

1. Minutes of previous Annual Meeting, held in Manchester on 12th September, 1935.
2. To receive the Annual Report of the Council, including the Report of the Honorary Treasurer and of the Honorary Auditors.

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3. To nominate and elect for the year 1936 two Honorary Auditors (who, in accordance with Bye-law C.4, may not be members of the Council).

4. To receive an invitation to hold the Annual Conference in Scarborough from the 31st May to 4th June, 1937, extended by Councillor T. Laughton, Chairman of the Public Libraries Sub-Committee, Scarborough.

5. To express the thanks of the Association to the Corporation of Margate and to all those who have facilitated the work of the Conference.

NOTE.—Members wishing to move any amendment to any of the resolutions on the above agenda must give written notification to the Secretary not later than the 30th May, after which date no amendment can be accepted.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS¹

F. SEYMOUR SMITH

YOU have honoured me by electing me, through your Council, as your President. I take the opportunity this occasion offers to thank you, and to express my appreciation of your confidence. It may seem a poor return for me to interrupt what I hope has otherwise been a pleasant day by reading an address, but custom wills it so, and nobody will allow me to escape from this duty. There are two advantages (for me) in reading a presidential address: one is, that there will be no discussion—therefore you cannot answer back; the other is, that I have no need to give a title to my paper: I can therefore roam at will along the main roads and by-lanes of librarianship without going outside my theme.

At one time it seemed almost certain that this address would be the last of its kind; that in 1937 there would be no A.A.L. to need a President, and therefore no Annual Meeting to listen to a presidential address. It is now quite certain that, if events do eventually move in this direction, they are not going to move as quickly as that. Although there will thus be no valedictory perorations in this address, I feel that the events of the last few months deserve to be examined against a background of professional history and the contemporary scene, and that it may be useful if I talk to-night about some of the problems and questions which I believe to be in the minds of many A.A.L. members.

¹ Read at Chaucer House at the Annual Meeting, 8th April, 1936.

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After being in existence eighty or more comparatively obscure years, the public library and its true function have been examined of late by powerful institutions and publicists. The Press, the educational authorities, well-known writers, all have discussed what they severally consider to be the purpose of our work, the objects they think we should hope to achieve, and the way they think we ought to develop. Those who profess to guide the young in the choice of a career have duly set forth their advice, and told us what, in their opinion, are the qualities needed to make a good librarian and the rates of pay those who possess these qualities may expect to receive. A very large proportion of this publicity is inaccurate, misleading, and worse. If you will consult the files of *Life and letters*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Listener*, and a few other papers, you will find much rubbish about the purpose of the public library and the alleged departures it is making from its proper function. If, for example, you look at one of the latest "career" books, you will find that, in the opinion of the compiler, the successful librarian's qualities are considered to be:

- Mathematical ability—negligible.
- Mechanical ability—negligible.
- Manual dexterity—negligible.
- Practical ability—of average significance.
- Draughtsmanship—negligible.
- Non-Perseveration—barely significant.
- Leadership—negligible.
- Adventurousness—negligible.
- Imagination—of average significance.
- Equanimity—barely significant.
- Accuracy—significant.
- Address—negligible.
- Health—barely significant.
- Sociability—important.
- Linguistic ability—important.
- Intelligence—important.

Saved by the last concession!

So that's what they think of us in some scholastic circles, for it is a teacher who writes thus. I suppose this might be worse, for we are allowed to need intelligence and sociability, even if our imaginations, ability to persevere, to

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lead, etc., are negligible. But can we blame outside people for these and similar errors, if we find that those inside the profession display almost as much ignorance of the fundamental principles of librarianship?

Presidential addresses, I find, are usually pleas for something. If this address is to be a plea for anything, it shall be a decided plea for a return to these fundamental principles and a general realization of the right and proper aims of public librarianship.

Mr. Joeckel, in his recently published thesis, which is, ironically enough, a 400-page book on the government of the American Public Library, exclaims in despair: "It is even difficult to state the aims and objects of library service in any forceful and compelling manner." Difficult, perhaps, but by no means impossible, and certainly not to be burked on account of difficulty. Incidentally, let it be said at once, to state anything so basically important in any other than a forceful and compelling manner is to be worse than useless.

Before, with the proper amount of diffidence, I deal with objects and aims, I want to restate the essentials of a good public library service:

1. A comprehensive collection of the standard and classical cultural literature of the world.
2. A selection of technical and professional literature.
3. A selection of contemporary literature.
4. A reference service to provide information and books to aid the student, the serious general reader, and the commercial user.
5. A trained staff.
6. Any extension work, outside the primary book service, which tends to promote the purely cultural and educational side of librarianship.

Forgive me if this is tediously obvious. I should not mention such details if it were not tediously obvious that many library workers have never considered these points, or if they have considered them have all too easily let them slip into the background. Furthermore, having these elementary statements fresh in mind will help to formulate "a forceful" and, I hope, "a compelling" statement of the aims and objects of our work. Without further consideration I will indeed state briefly that the whole aim of public library work is to place at the disposal of a community by means of books and a library service the literary instruments of culture, of vocational and technical education, and of recreation. In other words, we seek to provide books, and a book service, for the culture, education, and recreation of all citizens who wish to, or can be persuaded to, take advantage of the public library service.

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But why, ask Mr. James Agate and other sensational journalists—why should all this be provided from local rates? Mr. Agate goes so far as to say that those who use public libraries are in receipt of mental parish relief, and that he himself buys every book he wants to read.

Again, you may say that the reply to all this, to us, is very obvious. Yet Mr. Agate is no fool, nor are some of those who agree with him, and for whom he speaks. So if excuse is needed this evening for dealing with this gibe, let me use one so excellently phrased for another occasion by Professor Elliot Smith: "We should not be deterred from saying the obvious when it is precisely the obvious that needs saying. These things need emphasizing, because mere familiarity has induced (some of us) to ignore them." Now, everything Mr. Agate says has to be taken very seriously, for Mr. Agate is a professional jester, and professional jesters cannot afford to make many bad jokes. A wisecrack must occasionally be wise; its crack, like that in Blake's head, may be a crack that lets in the light.

For Mr. Agate is quite right, although I doubt if he would admit it. Public library service is mental parish relief. Individual members of the public, including possibly Agate himself, use public libraries because they cannot afford to collect private libraries, and because the public library service is beyond the purse of even the richest; the same people use a public water supply for the same reason; the same people use public art galleries because they cannot afford to own private art galleries and because the contents of the great galleries would be beyond the purse of the richest, even if their contents were not unique; some of the same people use a public swimming bath because they cannot afford to own a private swimming bath. Even Mr. Agate cannot buy all the books he wants to read, unless his reading needs are indeed as small as they sometimes appear to be from his articles, because some of the books he wants may be so scarce as to be almost unique, and moreover he cannot live in a house large enough to keep them.

The root of nearly all the depreciatory criticism of public library work and library workers is dissatisfaction, springing from the belief that public libraries have degenerated solely into fiction-lending libraries. It is claimed that the purpose of the Library Acts was purely educational, and that as modern fiction is not, presumably, educational, libraries should not buy and circulate this class of literature. It has been suggested that our fiction issues are out of all proportion to our non-fiction, that we do not welcome publicity on the question, and that we resent outside criticism. A vigorous mind from the North, a

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librarian's, inspiring, let it be admitted with gratitude, a delightful style which puts entirely into the shade that of the professional writers in the same magazine, states forthrightly that he is in agreement with these critics, deploring not only our fictional issues but the quality of the fiction it is alleged we have to handle. There comes another professional voice, stating in no uncertain terms that in at least one library a deliberate attempt is being made to avoid at all costs the novels of all third-rate writers, including the works of the great company of sob-sisters. The criterion here appears to be purely personal, since not even this librarian dares to exclude Wodehouse.

It appears, then, that there is division in our own ranks on this fundamental question. A reasonable amount of difference of opinion on the most important problems in any profession is to be expected and welcomed, but a profound difference of opinion on the very basis of our work is, in 1936, a significant and regrettable symptom of a misconception of basic principles. There are other symptoms.

We have librarians who stock only two or three of Hardy's novels, because they find the public does not ask for those not provided, and Hardy is considered to be a novelist who has had his day; some who no longer select "basic" stock; some who appear to despise the service which bibliography renders the careful book selector; others who buy standard and classical literature in the Everyman and similar editions; who would not replace old novels, such as those of Fanny Burney, who look with scorn on little-known works in the byways of English literature, and in general seek to give that vague mass, the public, only what it is thought the public wants. Some will buy contemporary fiction only when it is six or more months old; others buy new fiction only when they can secure review copies; others buy on publication all popular fiction; yet others buy little that is new, but, in the offensive jargon of the cheapjack book-salesman, order at frequent intervals 100 Hodders at 3s. 6d., less ten; titles to be "selected," if you please, from the wrappers.

I imagine that if an outside observer or investigator of our public library system were to correlate all these facts, he would jump to the conclusion that there must be grave gaps in our professional training, and that this chaotic state of affairs was the immediate result. It is, indeed, precisely the state of affairs you would expect from an unorganized professional body. We seem to have amongst us an all too large number of people of all grades who have no conception of their work as librarians, who are apparently untaught and unteachable. There is no other explanation of the lack of librarianship displayed

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in some of our libraries; no other explanation of the absurd requests for inter-loan we have all seen on the lists circulated through Regional Bureaux; no other explanation of the ridiculous errors of administration which we all know of, and can do little more than laugh at.

It is a grave mistake to imagine that these misfits are all over fifty. Youth must answer some of these charges, too.

In my opinion the most serious of all the charges which can, and have been, made against us are those referring to the quality of our book stocks. A library is, simply, a collection of books, and if the collection is a poor and inadequate selection, then the library and all else connected with it must be poor and inadequate. Hence, those who have strayed must get back to bibliography, to selection by means of evaluative bibliographies, and so by means of personal, scholarly knowledge. The alternative is plain: selection based haphazardly on fashion and personal preference. Fashion the librarian must not despise, if he is to be alive to the realities of the world he himself is living in. But let him be careful not to allow himself to be tied to the apron strings of such a changeable creature. Personal preference, similarly, will inevitably play a part in every librarian's work, but that part must be a small one in relation to the whole.

In one of the best books of literary criticism of recent years the writer discusses the function of the critic, and wisely asserts that "it is part of his business to preserve tradition—when a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it, *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time." I hope you will agree with me that this also adequately describes part of the business of a librarian. If we preserve tradition we shall show that we ourselves appreciate, nay, love, the literature without which we should scarcely exist as a learned profession. If we preserve tradition we shall not be guilty of excluding the lesser glories of the literature of the world because they *are* lesser, and because they do not happen to attract the attention of every man. But, indeed, I know few good books which do not justify their inclusion in a public library by the attention they receive from general readers, provided they are placed on open shelves in the best editions available. Many of you will have noticed, as I have done, that, to take a stray example, the Oxford Press edition of *Evelina*, published at 21s., will be read nearly as much as a contemporary novel, by scores of people who do not know and do not care who its author was, or when she lived, or whether her place in English literature is major or minor. The book is read

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in this edition primarily because it looks an interesting novel and *is* an interesting novel. But take it off the shelves, because it is a minor affair, after all, and in an age of Hitlers and Mussolinis seems to be remote from life, take it away and bury it in a stack room, and you will not be asked for it once a year. Buy only the cheap pocket edition, meant for the private library of bookmen with small houses and smaller incomes, and it will attract only a few literary-minded persons.

It must be admitted that the selection of contemporary fiction is indeed a difficult task, if an honest attempt is to be made to do the job with care, and due regard for the dignity of the library. The novel is still what it was in the days of Jane Austen, who was able to say that in it "the greatest powers of the mind are displayed," and that through it "the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineations of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language." There are several scores of novels published every year to which this praise can be worthily awarded. Fortunately, one need not read them all, for if there is one great deficiency in contemporary fiction it is individuality. Repetitive our novels may be, lacking the originality that a less commercial product usually possesses; yet nobody, so far as my reading goes, has yet made out a sound case for the wholesale condemnation of the modern novel. Critics often write and speak as if this had been done, though.

In fiction particularly, librarians have a definite responsibility towards books which have been judged to have literary merit by good critics, and which are read by people who are competent judges, whether such books are to be classified as "popular" or otherwise, whether they are old or new. Readers who know should be reminded of the good novels of past decades; those whose knowledge is mainly of the present should be given the opportunity of enlarging their sphere of literary interest. This is, or should be, one of the differences between a municipal lending library and a commercial library. If public libraries do not maintain a demand for certain worthy books, scores of them will soon be unobtainable. Many are so now. Is it right, is it librarianship, for us to wait until the stray accidents of cinema production or newspaper serialization awaken interest in minor or forgotten standard books? Of course not: we should do the awakening. Useless to say we cannot, as the general public cannot be induced to read anything except the newest, because I know we can; as I see it done every day I examine the shelves of the lending library. Is it right that a librarian should try to borrow from another library a

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novel by Stendhal, when the chief works of this great writer, who a hundred years ago was writing for this our own generation, are available as cheaply as 3s. 6d. Of course not. Is it sheer, unshamed ignorance or merely laziness that leads to this kind of thing? How many commercial librarians, after reading *Abinger harvest*, will rush to their catalogues to see if they have a copy of *Belchamber* in stock? Probably none. How many public librarians will do this? Two, three or four, do you think? The difference, ladies and gentlemen, should be greater than this. Don't think I want to sentimentalize over the old-fashioned glories of the past; far from it. But I do maintain that no reader and no librarian can judge the true merit of the new novel unless he has an extensive knowledge of past literature, and that if the novel is read for entertainment, as it rightly is, then for many there is as much entertainment in Mallock's *New republic*, for example, as there is in *Point counterpoint*.

Mediocre selection, due to lack of critical acumen, is not confined to fiction. Why did only one librarian, may the Muses preserve him, out of over sixty buy the 1918 volume of Hopkins' verse which Dr. Bridges issued in an edition of a thousand? The book was unobtainable from 1920 to 1930, and those living around London who wanted it had laboriously to copy out the poems in the British Museum, for this was before the days of union catalogues. Worse still, why are there still libraries without this book even now when it is obtainable for 7s. 6d.? There are actually fourteen metropolitan libraries without this seminal book, even though Hopkins has now become so praised as an innovator as to be overpraised!

But there is worse, much worse, to follow. Think of the importance, the grandeur, the extraordinary qualities of Bach's "Art of Fugue"! A popular work, one of the musical treasures of our civilization. Nothing highbrow (odious term) about it, for the works of its composer pack the Queen's Hall to suffocation at concerts which are as "lowbrow" as good musical concerts can possibly be. Yet inquire for the score of this famous work in any of the libraries of the Home Counties and you will not find it in any save one. Worse still, inquire for it in the libraries of the greatest city of the world, and you will, unless you are fortunate in lighting on the four who possess it, be gravely disappointed. I could go on like this for more than a melancholy half-hour, but I am not going to, it's too depressing. Mention any modern book of indubitable first-class importance, and I can unhappily feel pretty sure you will be amazed to find how few libraries possess it. Books that should be in every library as surely as a Holy Bible should be in every church are as rare as

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kisses in the works of Jane Austen. Books that have been recommended in the strongest terms in the professional papers, books that have altered this generation's attitude to life, are to be found in only four, five, and six libraries out of twenty-eight. Why is this? Carelessness? Incompetence? Ignorance? Laziness? Who can say? I cannot.

The librarian's duty is plain: in every branch of literature he must select the best, and in some even the second best, ranging in treatment from the learned and scholarly to the elementary, in time from the classical and standard to the books of the current week. He must allow a reasonable percentage of his book money to be spent on fiction, and should buy important original novels (they are few) as soon as they are published. Haphazard methods must go. Replace them by a rigid system, consistently applied, and we shall be able to answer our critics with confidence.

Let us hear no more of that absurd dictum that the librarian who reads is lost. I should say the librarian who *doesn't* read is a frost. And when I say he must read, I mean he must really read. He must want to make himself acquainted with as many good books as he can. The sight of a new book by a first-class writer should give him the same thrill and excitement which the sight of Don Bradman wielding a bat gives Neville Cardus. When that thrill goes, then indeed he is lost. He should be curious and patient enough to read the works of reputable writers he cannot understand; student enough to always be a student. In short, the librarian should know a great deal about the means of his livelihood, just as, if he is a motorist, he expects a mechanic to know quite a lot about motor-cars.

If we see literature steadily and see it whole we shall not be guilty of the serious error of excluding from our libraries contemporary writers who annoy those who cannot understand them. We must remember that many readers are like the Victorian English travellers who thought it was the duty of all foreigners to learn to speak English; many readers and officials in high positions think it the duty of all contemporary writers to write only books which they themselves can understand: anything else must be nonsensical fake, for are they not as intelligent as anybody else? The truth is that, to learn to distinguish the fake from the sincere, the worthy from the unworthy, the trick from the truth, requires hard work, hard reading, critical acumen, and uncommon good sense. This is our work, and, hard as it is, we have to learn to do it with as few mistakes as we can, otherwise we have no right to state that our profession requires training and education of a high order, worthy of high status and high

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salary. We should be able to justify the purchase of every book we recommend for purchase, and give a convincing, reasonable argument for not buying any book we do *not* recommend. A high ideal for highbrows, you may say; yes, but are not all ideals high? Let us leave the lowlands to the lowbrows and refuse to be browbeaten.

I would buy, for example, Mr. H. A. Vachell's new book, even though I think it a poorish sort of attempt at thinking. It is not a bad book, only complacent and superficial. Mr. Vachell has a public; he writes easily, and interestingly. His public has the right to expect his book to be in the local public library. But the librarian must see that he has also in the library the books that will help readers to put this book and others like it in true perspective. When Mr. Vachell touches an economic theme of some importance, just at the point when he is beginning to think he washes his hands of the whole business, and says, "Is there need to say more?" the public library reader, adequately served, well trained on Ruskin and his successors will cry, "Yes—much need." That is why a public library is an educational asset to a community. I give this as but a passing personal example. I repeat, in book selection, our ideal must be high. Any weaker attitude than this, the fairly rigid application of definite standards of choice, will result in the discrediting of the public library movement in the eyes of all but the kind of reader who will read nothing save the simplest fiction and the most sensational non-fiction. Those who seek to build up large issues by serving the interests of these readers to the detriment of the legitimate demands of others, are running after an ephemeral popularity which is almost valueless.

In searching for the cause of distressing variations of practice in this and other spheres of our work one is led to the conclusion that the chief reason is merely the weakness which comes from lack of training. Undoubtedly, just as the best doctors are those who have been fortunate enough to be allowed to give their services to the great hospitals, so the best library workers are those who have been trained in first-class libraries. It must be our chief aim, in the next few years, to increase the number of first-class libraries, and hence of first-class librarians.

From the various comments and discussions that have recently been so frequent, one would imagine that in the opinion of many it is possible to make first-class librarians by means of examinations. Nothing could be farther from the truth. A written examination can never be more than a test of knowledge, and a test, too, in which chance must play an annoyingly large part. Many of

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you must have read the recently published report on an examination of examinations. If you have not, I should strongly advise you not to, if you have still to be examined. (You will agree that ours is a truly horrid world, when examiners themselves are being subjected to examination.) It appears that our own type of examination—in which the essay type of answer is mainly required—is the very type which is most subject to the vagaries of chance. This particular series of tests was conducted under conditions which were very much more favourable to the candidate than those obtaining at any public examination, for the examiners were not rushed through their work, and, further, they all knew that they themselves were on trial. Even so, the results were so amazing that our confidence in the examination system as a test of ability and knowledge must suffer a severe shock. Experienced examiners differed in their opinion on the merits of the same scripts so much that some would place certain candidates at the head of their group, thus considering them as worthy of high examination honours; others would place the same candidates at the bottom, declaring them hopeless failures. Even more exasperating revelations follow: examiners who passed candidates in January, failed them when asked to re-examine the same scripts a few months later, when they had had time to forget their previous decisions. What are we to make of all this? No wonder youth is thought to be cynical, indifferent, laodicean in its attitude to all the hitherto sacrosanct ideals and objects of life. In truth, youth is nothing of the sort. Young men and women of to-day are only too, too eager to believe in the integrity of the leaders of nations. They would like to be able to believe in the lofty sentiments of the teachers of mankind; but on all sides they see themselves surrounded by rather too much humbug and mumbo-jumbo for any reasonable person to swallow. The pretence and hypocrisy of public life has, of course, always been there, but few have realized it. Now we have all been taught to examine motives and conduct too deeply to permit of unconscious self-deception. The miserable result of all this has been that we *allow* ourselves to be deceived in order to escape a feeling of impotence and helplessness. We switch on our radio sets, and whatever country we listen to, the same mumbo-jumbo ritual will be doled out, and we shall hear the youth of all nations responding with massed "Jas," "Heils," and their various equivalents. Even in our own land, fortunately still a little freer than many, a national crisis or any event of national importance is beginning to bring with it the well-trained, hushed voices from announcers, the carefully simulated emotion which finally succeeds in convincing even its own victims. Behind it all we can hear the

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distant beat of the tom-tom and the frenzied shrieks of the witch-doctors. All our books, all our learning, all our education have done but this, that we are able to see how flimsy is the emotional barrier between us and the savage. A poor reward for mankind's endeavour to climb, but nevertheless in that very comprehension lies our hope of real progress. Those who cannot comprehend are merely in the way of that progress.

Young men and women are criticized on all sides by their elders because of their attitude to life, work, and leisure. Mr. G. K. Chesterton summed up the attitude of his generation to the post-war generation when he inveighed recently against that excellent epitome of our times—the poem entitled *The Hollow Men*:

*"Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion . . .
. . . This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper."*

Mr. Chesterton doesn't like that whimper; he believes in the bang; but the only bang he would allow would be the bang of his own hands clapping with delight at the good fun there is to be had in the world. Happy G. K. C. ! We can stifle the whimper, indeed we must, for very pride in our own strength and courage, but an umbrella of platitude is a poor protection against a rain of bombs. Our elders take refuge in memory and in the stability that an early quiet confidence in the inherent goodness of things would naturally give to those who passed their youth in less troublous times. But, like the earlier poet, younger men and women are driven devious—

*" . . . tempest-toss'd,
Sails ripp'd, seams opening wide and compass lost."*

This is doubtless the reason that makes all contemporary art which is not escapist or repetition so uncomfortably shocking. Our music is acid and acrid, with harmonies that torture the ear and melodies that shrill their unquiet way into disturbing rhythms, suggesting the power-house in charge of a madman; much of our literature, no longer able to scale the heights, shrieks its formless way along a muddy track, mouthing uncouth proletarian realism. Postmen knock, knock, for dear life, somebody is always shooting horses out of sheer

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pity, and appointments in Samaria are kept daily. Instead of avoiding them we even buy motor-cars to make us punctual in keeping them.

This is our world—and much as we try to escape from it by enclosing ourselves in a small circle of either scholarship or individualism, we, as librarians, cannot escape.

Perhaps you are asking what this has to do with us as librarians. I hope you are not, for it should be obvious that it has everything to do with us. We are public servants in a sphere of work which more than any other, save that of formal education, bears a great educational responsibility. Our library service must not only help to expose the mumbo-jumbo ritual, but must furnish the thinking minds of our communities with the knowledge to combat it, the faith to believe in progress and the ideas with which to build the future. If we fail to do this we are neglecting our important duty so horribly that we do not deserve to continue as a professional body.

What should be, then, our main objectives as a body of assistants, fully conscious of our place as citizens in this troublous era, fully aware of our responsibilities as professional men and women, if we wish to prepare our world and our work for its exciting future. For the future will be exciting, without doubt. Depressing as these years are, yet who does not feel their importance in the history of Europe? I will try to indicate our own professional path in a few words: vitality, social knowledge, training, and unity.

I place vitality first, because on this, and all that it implies, depends the force of the others. We must have a vital association depending on vital membership. All associations carry their weight of dead members: we carry too much. If a reasonable proportion of our membership were alive we should not have such disgraceful figures to be ashamed of in our ballot. Both in our own Section and in the Library Association itself the apathy of members is amazing. If nobody grumbled at the L.A. except those who voted at the annual elections, I fancy we should hear but few expressions of discontent. Think of the small number of our own members who troubled to vote on the most important decision we have ever placed before them! Useless to murmur apologetically that they must have been deliberate abstainers, because all the available evidence goes to show that these were comparatively few. The first ballot, by reason of the limitation imposed by the Council, may have led some to think that the supposed implicit invitation to those who disagreed with the proposal to refrain from voting, was accepted by a large proportion of our members, but the number who did not vote in the second ballot clearly shows, to my mind, that an

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all too large proportion of our Section do not care whether we are absorbed by the Library Association or the Dustmen's Union. Must we import Herr Goebbels to ensure that we get a 90 per cent. vote? If 90 per cent. voted on the amalgamation proposals, 85 per cent. being against them, nobody would have been more pleased than I, even though I consider the rejected scheme an excellent piece of work. For this would have meant that nine out of ten of our colleagues were vitally interested in their own future and, failing the production of a better scheme, that it might be possible to start afresh a new Association of Assistant Librarians even more alive than the old Association. It was surely fatal ever to become a Section of the Library Association if the bulk of the members were not prepared for complete absorption on reasonable terms. We do not want the work of the past six years to be sacrificed together with the achievements of the A.A.L. up to 1930. The voting at the L.A. elections is even more deplorable. Is this, too, to be explained by the deliberate abstention theory? I hardly think so. Nor by the explanation sometimes advanced that members are not satisfied with their Association, do not trust it, have no use for it, would not belong to it if they could help it, despise it, deplore it, detest it. To condemn a thing you need to know more about it than those who believe in it. The depreciation of the novels of Sir Walter Scott by an Australian aboriginal would be interesting, but trivially unimportant; their condemnation by Mr. E. M. Forster is of the greatest interest and of vital critical importance. Hence, if Mr. Jast told me the L.A. Council was more of a hindrance to us than a help, I should sit up and take notice; but when Mr. Blank, Librarian of Dulltown, condemns the same Body in no uncertain terms, as he has done so often, I pity Mr. Blank, because I know he never attends a professional meeting, never writes a professional paper, never mentally stirs outside his own library and would get many shocks if he did.

I place social awareness and knowledge next to vitality, for the reasons I have alluded to earlier. Men and women doing work of social importance in connexion with the most important adult educational medium next to broadcasting cannot do their work well unless they are aware of the significance of the world they live in. Training is all-important, but it must have this basis to build on. Training in good libraries must be intensified, and much as we may distrust the efficacy of our examination system we must continue with this method of testing professional knowledge and capacity until we can think of a better way. From a limited experience as an examiner I will say candidly that I believe our candidates are treated fairly and humanely. At the same time

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I think we should take our part in the recent investigations into examinations of which I have spoken, and I hope the L.A. Council will soon be able to conduct a series of tests to establish the relative efficiency of its educational work. If the results are too shocking they can, after all, be kept dark; if reassuring, as I believe they would be, their publication would do much to keep candidates from despair.

Professional unity I have kept to the last. It is essential to the development of our work. A strong, completely unified association, in which the voices of the youngest members will be heard with those of members who have reached the "I remember, I remember" stage, is an ideal which must be realized. The existence of an Assistants' section is, as such, I think, an anomaly nowadays, when it is recognized that we are all librarians with common interests and a common task. It is sensible to divide members geographically: this gives us branches; it is sensible to divide people by the type of work they are doing: that gives us the County Library Section, etc., but it is most unwise to divide members by rank. To continue to do so will perpetuate an artificial distinction which we hear on all sides is now extinct. The main functions of the Section are to pass on to the parent body the opinions, suggestions, requirements, and decisions of younger members of the profession and to provide an opportunity for young men and women to work for themselves and their job outside the walls of their own library. If a scheme can be evolved which ensures the continuance of these two functions, then I plead for the acceptance of that scheme. I myself believe such a scheme has been evolved, many do not agree with me. I want to ask the Council to permit me to invite every one of those who rejected the late lamented proposals to state as briefly as possible what it is they objected to. As they say on the wireless, "Please do not forget. Send what you can to me as soon as possible, addressed to President, A.A.L., Chaucer House, London, W.C.1."

If the response to this appeal is large enough it should be helpful. Make it large, so large that we shall have to engage a staff of clerks to open the letters and tabulate the objections. We must not on any account let the work and energy, the faith and vitality that have been put into the A.A.L. since its inception disappear. Librarianship and training for librarianship has been a continuous growth. True that growth has at times been so small and slow that the lethargic and half-dead have been able to keep pace with it without losing what breath of life they have possessed. But compared with ten years ago the present pace is so great that many are thinking we shall need crash helmets

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before long. Humming with activity as it is, however, Chaucer House can stand a good deal more before it will show signs of wear and tear. If we can inoculate the majority of our members with the virility and vitality possessed by the few we shall have little to fear. But depreciation and destructive criticism is not a sign of vitality: it is a sign of unwillingness to change. If members do not trust their present Council's ability it is their duty to see that it is not re-elected; that would indeed be a sign of vitality, provided nine out of ten members register their votes. Much as I would personally dislike this particular expression of vital interest, I think it would be preferable to hearing an S O S in these terms: "Will any past members of a now defunct Association of Assistant Librarians, last heard of in 1937, go at once to Chaucer House, Malet Place, London, where their vocation, librarianship, is lying dangerously ill?"



QUESTION AND ANSWER

L.A. ELEMENTARY EXAMINATION

ELEMENTARY ADMINISTRATION, QUESTION 1

For what does a library committee exist?

MODEL ANSWER FOR THE USE OF STUDENTS

There is no special reason for the existence of a library committee except that it prevents the librarian spending as much money as he would like to. This is called democracy. But as librarians have been sat on like this for so many years, they would be afraid to spend a lot of money, even if there wasn't a committee. There are several things which a committee does:

1. It holds monthly meetings, and talks about books and betting news, and what is the librarian doing to keep the reading room quiet and things like that.
2. It discusses big questions and comes to decisions. It leaves the little ones to the librarian. This means that, while the librarian can reorganize the library and staff and say nothing about it, provided that it doesn't cost anything, he has to tell the committee if he wants a new typewriter. And then he doesn't get it. Librarians reorganize their libraries when they haven't got much else to do. Their staffs usually have, and don't like it. This is called staff opposition to new ideas.

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3. It does book selection. The librarian reads the *T.L.S.* the week before the committee meeting, and makes out a long list of books. He passes this on to the staff and they make copies of it. The Town Clerk sends one to each member of the committee, and they lose them, and when they come to the committee meeting they say can I have another and there aren't any more and then there is a dust-up. Then somebody asks the librarian if he really wants a book, and, of course, he has to say yes. He tells the committee why he wants it, and then everybody begins to yawn, and so in the end the committee tells the librarian that he can buy all the books. And he thanks the committee, but it doesn't really matter, because he's already bought them, anyway. This is called democratic control of experts.

4. It inspects the library and says, can't the librarian get the porter to clean those windows better, and why are the staff standing about doing nothing? And the librarian, who knows that the committee always come at a slack time, when everybody else is at work, has to say that he will change everything, although he knows he can't, anyway. This is called library ethics.

5. It elects a chairman, who sees that the librarian does his job properly and shows him how to do it, if he's making a mess of it. And the chairman usually thinks he is. Everybody knows the chairman, and they tell him what's wrong with the library. And he tells the librarian. And as the librarian has always said that he likes suggestions from members of the public he has to listen, and then they begin to argue, and usually the librarian wins and they don't do anything after all. The chairman goes to the L.A. conference with the librarian, and gets up on the platform and says his librarian is the best in the country, but he doesn't believe it really. But he thinks it pleases the librarian, and, as it isn't easy to do this without spending a lot of money, he does it.

The committee helps to keep the library in the public eye, because what they do gets into the local paper, and local inhabitants read all about it, and say, did you hear what old Smith said about the library last week? This is called library publicity.

TUTOR.

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AN ASSISTANT'S DIARY

"SCRIPTOR"

14th March.—Had occasion this afternoon to reprimand borrower (albeit in my gentlest manner!) for trying to force open the wicket before I had time to release the catch. Moreover, this particular borrower, one of long standing and regular attendance, and should have known better by this time, which I jokingly told him. So remarked to colleague upon the seeming ignorance and unnoticeability (is there such a word, Mr. Ed.?) of so many ordinary persons, not only in practical matters of this kind, but also in other ways as well. To wit, the finding of particular class in arithmetical order on the shelves, the finding of names and addresses in directories, and even in the finding of trains in *Bradshaw*! Which latter I could never understand being so universal a laughing-stock. 'Twas never a puzzle to me, for its geographical arrangement seems to me very convenient. To all of this my colleague agreed, and so fell to wondering whether, by living with these things, we library assistants are in a class apart! God forgive me if I boast unduly.

20th March.—Had some difficulty last two days in deciphering date of books issued on 13th, many looking like 18th. Remembering other such difficulties, wondered whether any other identification could be made when figures have tendency to be alike. Though bad stamping is in great part the cause of this, there comes a time when, being busy, it is not possible to be so gentle with every book, and a bad stamp itself may add to the confusion. So called to mind that in one library where I was they had, at one time, a separate stamp for each assistant, with a distinguishing letter in each. Thus a bad impression could at once be traced to the offending assistant. But this practice, in my humble opinion, is undesirable and unnecessary, and did not last very long.

23rd March.—Reading in this month's *Record* the reports of Branch meetings, noticed the tantalizing title of a paper read at the Junior Meeting at Kidderminster, but no indication of paper's contents, much to my chagrin. The Reports in the ASSISTANT also have this tendency to report everything uninteresting and leave out the substance that we should thrive on. So what about it, Mr. Editor? We are not concerned as to who has been appointed Branch Secretary or Treasurer, but we are, or should be, concerned in what the Branch is talking about.

31st March.—Much annoyed at closing time by two borrowers who refused to hurry, particularly as I wished to be off to another engagement. Such things

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will happen! Any other night almost would have mattered little. Then, as these were at last going, another hurries in to renew half a dozen books! Luckily it was only to renew them. At last departed inwardly at war, wishing that we now had in force an old rule at one time in force at another library, to the effect that no borrower be allowed in a quarter-hour before closing time. Though even then I suppose someone would linger till last possible moment.

3rd April.—Reading *A.A.L. Annual Report*, proud to see the special mention of this diary, thanking Providence for the sudden inspiration of it, not forgetting Mr. Gardner, who so readily took to it. Hope its usefulness will improve with its popularity. And this can only be achieved by readers sending me their opinions and ideas for a general exchange in these pages.

5th April.—Read a sentence in "Valuations" of this month's ASSISTANT that made me sit up suddenly. Blyth has been renting "ephemeral fiction from a commercial library"! How many librarians have noticed this? And how many have shaken their heads and hurriedly thumbed the pages of their copies of Library Law! Cannot call to mind anything therein that is contrary to this practice, and of course commercial libraries were scarcely known in the days of the last Library Act. Moreover, I suppose there is no question about its legality at all, but that is the question about it that immediately came to my mind. It's a good practice, surely, and one that could profitably be spread abroad. But again, how many librarians will go so far even as to broach their Committees thereon?

11th April.—Received via Mr. Editor a letter heartily endorsing my sentiments about the ASSISTANT, expressed in my entry for 5th March. He supports the contention that there is a separate existence of "assistants" in the L.A., even if it be a minor one. And this existence should have its own freedom of expression. "Now is the time," he says, "for courage." And I add my voice thereto also, such as it is. As I have said again and again, and will continue to say, I see no reason against there being room in one Association for two periodicals. May the Council not forget this in their new negotiations.

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NEW MEMBERS

CENTRAL.—S. A. Bird (Hereford County, Hereford); Miss M. L. Harries, 23, Guilford Street, London, W.1; Agnes McKenzie (Edinburgh); W. Murray (Lanark County, Motherwell); G. L. Pyke (Taunton); Miss E. M. Sherlock (Kent County, Ashford); Kathleen P. L. Spiller (Aberdeen County, Aberdeen); Miss M. P. Varco (Essex County, Romford).

Midland.—Miss C. D. Brighton, Miss J. C. Cowan, H. Piper (Birmingham); Miss Joan Maurenson (Grantham); Miss J. L. Bunce (Leamington).

North-Eastern.—W. Foy (Blyth); Erica K. Hodson (Barrow-in-Furness).

North-Western.—Miss C. W. Higson (Southport).

Yorkshire.—D. M. Fussey, H. G. Townshend (Hull); K. Lawton; Miss M. Wilcox (Macclesfield).

RESIGNATION.—Miss Parry (Essex County, Romford) has retired on her marriage.



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THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.
DEAR SIR,—

In support of Col. Stuart's recent letter on examination failures, we, although in favour of the present high standard imposed, wish to protest against the system under which the L.A. examinations and the Correspondence Courses are now run, in particular against (1) the meagreness of information on the marking system, and (2) the inconsistency of the tutors' advice.

It is essential that students should know what is a pass standard, what standard they reach in the examination, and, further, that the advice on style, fullness of entry, method of setting out answers (now so variously treated by tutors) is standardized.

May we therefore suggest:

1. That tutors be allowed access to view the examination papers of students,

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in order that they may gauge correctly the pass standard, and standardize accordingly their advice to students.

2. That the fullness and style of entry required in the practical cataloguing paper be precisely defined.

3. That a more detailed report be published on each examination, the number of marks gained by candidates being available on application.

Yours faithfully,

KENNETH JOHN LING.

JOAN HUNT.

EDWIN A. WELLS.

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THE EDITOR,

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

Let Mr. Leyland think again: is my scheme as selfish and impracticable as he suggests?

If the object of the Library Association Examinations is to separate wheat from chaff, it must be admitted that in the past they have been inefficient in doing so, and with the introduction of a new and more worthy syllabus, *equivalent to those of the other professions*, an opportunity is presented for a fresh degree to be created, which would carry far more immediate weight than the F.L.A. *de nouveau* to the world at large, and would enable those of deserving qualities to separate themselves from the masses of the present by passing an additional test—surely only “for the good of the profession.”

Once this system had worked itself out, and all those who could reasonably hope to transfer from Fellowship to Diplomateship had done so, there should follow a sanely regulated stream of librarians, who would not have to face unfair competition from the earlier-qualified men, and, if the L.A. does its duty, salaries to do them justice.

Yours faithfully,

J. R. SMITH.

THE DIVISIONS

MIDLAND DIVISION

A MEETING of the Library Association, Birmingham and District Branch, and the Midland Division of the Association of Assistant Librarians was held at Coventry on Wednesday, 18th March, 1936, by kind invitation of the Chairman (Mr. Councillor R. W. Harris) and members of the Coventry Public Libraries Committee.

During the afternoon visits were paid to the Central and several branch libraries. Members were afterwards officially welcomed by His Worship the Mayor (Mr. Alderman Charles Payne, J.P.) and the Chairman of the Public Libraries Committee (Mr. Councillor R. W. Harris). This took place in St. Mary's Hall, where tea was also served, by kind invitation of His Worship the Mayor.

After tea, the Junior Meeting was held in the Council Chamber. The chair was taken by Mr. L. H. Sidwell (Coventry), and a paper entitled "Facing the facts" was read by Mr. B. A. Corral, also of the Coventry Public Libraries.

The Library Association Meeting followed. Mr. H. M. Cashmore, Chairman of the Joint Committee, presided, and Mr. E. Austin Hinton, City Librarian, Coventry, read a paper, entitled "A Library service in a growing industrial city."

The meeting closed with votes of thanks to all those who had contributed to the success of the meeting. Finally, before members left the Council House, coffee was served by kind invitation of the Coventry Public Libraries staff.

SOUTH-WESTERN DIVISION

On Wednesday, 4th March, the Division held a meeting at Eastleigh. The party, consisting of members from Bournemouth, Southampton, Portsmouth, Winchester, and Poole, were met by Mr. J. Hoskins, Librarian at Eastleigh, and spent the afternoon touring the Locomotive Works of the Southern Railway. Here was seen every process in the manufacture of the giant engines. This tour was under the direction of Councillor Coles, of Eastleigh.

Tea was served in the Town Hall.

The General Meeting took place in the Library, and was in the form of a Magazine Evening. Sixteen articles were submitted, consisting of humorous

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poems, professional articles, and short stories, the first prize being won by Mr. L. Carver, of Portsmouth, and the second by Mr. G. Marks, of Bournemouth. The successful winners received their prizes from the President, Mr. H. Sargeant, Librarian of Portsmouth.

SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DIVISION

A meeting was held at Cardiff on Wednesday, 4th March. During the afternoon the members visited the *Western Mail* Printing Works, where they saw the process of producing the *Echo* for the evening. Leaving behind the roar of the press, a move was made to the Central Library, where a sumptuous banquet (on the bring-your-own principle) was enjoyed. Then followed the meeting, the address being given by F. J. Boardman, Esq., Librarian of Rotherham. His subject was "The Medium-sized library," and was admirably illustrated by photographs and plans. The discussion and questions which followed showed that the address had aroused considerable interest, and the vote of thanks to the speaker was heartily applauded. Mr. C. Sexton was in the Chair for this meeting. The evening was rounded off by dancing and games.

On 11th March, 1936, the Division held a Joint Meeting with the Welsh Branch of the Library Association at Merthyr Tydfil. After the Annual General Meeting of the Branch (a most uneventful one), a visit was made to the Museum at Cyfarthfa Castle, where, amongst other things, we were shown a very interesting collection of bindings worked by the Curator. The new library, well-situated in the centre of the town, was also visited. Tea followed at the Peter Pan Café, and we were addressed by the Deputy Mayor and W. Llewellyn Davies, Librarian of the National Library of Wales and Chairman of the Branch. Thanks were accorded to the Mayor for his kind hospitality.

That part of the meeting organized by the Division took place after tea in the Council Chamber and was addressed by R. W. Lynn, Esq., Librarian of Birkenhead. His paper treated of "Factors in the history of the library movement," and although it proved difficult to discuss afterwards, it was nevertheless an interesting one. On the proposal of Mr. C. Sexton, seconded by Mr. L. M. Rees, Mr. Lynn was thanked for his address, and the meeting then concluded.

The meeting of the Division held at Barry on 1st April was an excellent one, except in so far as the weather saw fit to do its worst with a continuous down-pour.

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Mr. R. I. Hurdidge, Librarian of Barry, and his Chairman, Councillor R. G. Russell, met the members, escorted them into two motor-coaches, and wafted them first to a view of Messrs. Rank's Flour Mills, and then to tea at the Glan-y-Mor Hostel. Under the guidance of Mr. W. A. Robertson we saw the making of flour from cargo hold to final packing, and at the Hostel Mr. Russell told us about the place, a little about himself, and withal was a very humorous and genial host.

The meeting, with Mr. E. Sellick in the chair, followed at the Memorial Hall, a building of which Barry is justly proud. Here Mr. G. C. Poole, Deputy Librarian of Hendon, spoke on London libraries; and was followed by Mr. W. H. Phillips, Branch Librarian, Dagenham, who told us of Dagenham and its surrounding libraries. These speeches showed plainly the enormous advantages that the younger library systems enjoy unhampered by old buildings. The photographs, plans, forms, and posters that the speakers had brought with them proved particularly interesting, and being both old members of the Cardiff Staff, the speakers were at home with their audience.

Mr. C. Sexton and Mr. W. J. Collett voiced the thanks of the meeting to Messrs. Poole and Phillips, and also to those responsible for the local arrangements for the event.

W. J. C.

THE ESSEX GUILD OF LIBRARIANS

About fifty librarians and assistants attended the inaugural meeting of the Essex Guild of Librarians on 18th March, held by kind permission of the Chelmsford Public Library Committee at the new library in Duke Street. The chair was taken by Mr. J. L. Wilson, F.L.A., and Mr. J. G. O'Leary, F.L.A., was called upon to address the meeting on the "Public library service in Essex."

Mr. O'Leary spoke from notes only, but it is to be hoped that he will commit the substance of such an interesting and important address to paper. Briefly outlining the history of the public library movement in Essex, Mr. O'Leary explained the growth of suburban areas beyond extra-metropolitan London, and pointed out the necessity for, and the difficulties involved in, the provision of a library service equal to that provided by the neighbouring London boroughs.

After a very good discussion, Mr. O'Leary, in his reply, pointed out the opportunity for further consideration of the question at the forthcoming conference at Worthing. The Chairman then introduced the proposal for an

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Essex Guild, which would be informal and temporary, functioning only as long as no provision was made under the new Library Association scheme. Most of those present were in favour of the idea, and it was decided to hold quarterly meetings, an Organizing Committee of Messrs. S. G. Berriman, R. L. W. Collison, and E. A. Leyland being appointed. The meeting recorded a hearty vote of thanks to the Chelmsford Public Library Committee, Mr. J. L. Wilson, and his staff for an interesting evening, and many stayed for a further examination of the attractive building in which the meeting took place.

R. L. W. C.

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